

COMMENTARY

CAN WE FREE EASTERN EUROPE NOW?

Why Neither Liberation nor Settlement Seems in Sight

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THE greatest political problem in Europe, which was open at the time of Stalin's death, remains open today. Even within its 1938 frontiers, the Soviet Union would be a formidable military and industrial power. But the conquest of 100 million East Europeans, together with the considerable economic resources of their countries, has increased Soviet war potential by more than half. Among the 100

THE June 17 uprising in East Berlin, coupled with evidences of unrest in the satellites, seemed to many to open the possibility of loosening the Soviet Union's grip on Eastern Europe. Some saw it as an occasion to step up the crusade for liberation, others considered the USSR might be receptive to a negotiated settlement looking to withdrawal: a neutralized Germany, for example, plus a non-aggression pact with the West. Here HUGH SETON-WATSON examines these hopes in the light of hard realities and tells why he believes that, though any great change or "heroic solution" in the immediate future is unlikely, forces are working under the surface that may eventually put the liberation of Eastern Europe on the agenda of the day. Mr. Seton-Watson is professor of Russian history in the School of Slavonic Eastern European Studies of the University of London, and the author of several works on Eastern Europe and Russia, the most recent of which is *From Lenin to Malenkov* (Praeger). In May 1953 we published his article "The Colonial System of the USSR."

million are nearly 20 million Germans. Having seized the lands between the Elbe and Western Russia—whose fate has been a principal cause of two world wars—the Soviet leaders aim to extend their empire over the whole of Germany. Should they succeed, Western Europe would be doomed, and the United States would be in mortal peril. If these disasters are to be avoided, then two supreme aims of Western policy must be kept constantly in sight. These are, firstly, to deny Moscow control over Germany, and secondly, to break Moscow's grip on Eastern Europe, and especially on its two economically and militarily most powerful countries—Poland and Czechoslovakia. The two aims are inseparable, but their achievement will be not only difficult but also complicated and long drawn out. There are no sudden miraculous solutions.

THERE have always been two alternative means to achieve the Soviet purpose of domination of Germany. One is to extend to the whole country the Stalinist regime established since 1946 under the puppets Ulbricht and Pieck. The other is to permit the creation of a truly united and independent Germany, and to make it an ally of the Soviet Union against the West.

In theory, the first alternative could be achieved in one of three ways—by force, by

propaganda, or by diplomatic maneuver. It has never seemed very likely that the Soviet government intended to wage war for the conquest of Germany. Since the failures of the Berlin blockade and North Korean-Chinese aggression, it has become almost inconceivable. The prospect that the German people would be converted to Stalinism by the example of the rhetoric of Ulbricht and Pieck is no brighter. The Soviet leaders may for a time have believed their own fantasies about the increasing misery in the Western zones, and the mounting enthusiasm of the toiling masses for the great "German Democratic Republic" in the East. But they have recently received two blows which must have shattered most of their illusions. The first was the revolt in Berlin, and other cities of the Eastern Zone, which clearly showed the hatred and contempt felt by the German people, and especially by the German workers, for the German Stalinists. The second was the electoral victory of Dr. Adenauer, which showed that the man whom Soviet propaganda had unceasingly denounced as an American agent and a traitor to Germany had greatly increased his popular support in the last years. Finally, the prospects of diplomatic maneuver are also small.

Public statements of Soviet policy pay lip service to the ideal of a united independent Germany. But it has always been clear that the only kind of united Germany that the Soviet government is willing to see is one in which the German Stalinists would from the start hold such strong positions that they could reasonably hope within a fairly short time to seize power. The Soviet tactic has been to secure a united German government roughly similar to the Czechoslovak government of 1945, from which in due course the Gottwald dictatorship of 1948 emerged. But it is by now abundantly clear that the Western powers would not fall for a maneuver of this sort. Still less would the West German politicians. Even the Social Democrats, who played with the notion of "neutralism," would not have considered it, much less Adenauer. And

after his victory of September 6 Adenauer is a force to be reckoned with. The time when the German problem could be arranged without considering German wishes is past.

IF THEN the first alternative, the extension of a Stalinist regime to all Germany by force, by propaganda, or by diplomacy is ruled out, there remains the second, the creation of a united and independent Germany.

From the Soviet point of view this would be a gamble, the exchange of a concrete asset for a hope. Moscow would give up its direct control over the lives of 18 million Germans in the hope that the new united Germany would take the side of the Soviet Union against the West. It would be a big gamble for big stakes. There would be a risk that the whole of Germany would join the Western camp, and Soviet positions in Eastern Europe be imperiled. On the other hand, the many latent causes of friction between Germany and the West could be exploited by Soviet diplomacy, and great use could be made of the German desire to regain the lands lost to the Poles and Czechs.

As long as Stalin lived it was safe to assume that the gamble would not be made. Stalin's character did not work that way. He would not give up an asset for a hope. He recognized only two categories, slaves and enemies. He was capable of striking bargains with existing independent great powers, usually at the expense of third parties—with Ribbentrop in 1939, with Roosevelt and Churchill in 1945, in both cases at the expense of Poland. He was not capable of turning a satellite into an independent great power, in the hope that it would later become his ally. But when Stalin died all this became less certain. Perhaps the new men had more elastic minds. Perhaps a gamble on German unity and independence would prove, from the Soviet point of view, an act of statesmanship.

Whether this was seriously discussed, and whether it was the subject of a disagreement between Malenkov and Beria, or between Beria and the Soviet army, we cannot know today. But if it was considered, it was re-

jected after the June revolt in Berlin. Much has been written of those stirring events from the point of view of revolutionary action within a totalitarian state—a subject of the greatest interest and importance. Rather less attention has been paid to their effect on Soviet policy towards Germany. Here two historical parallels may be of some help.

In March 1921 the sailors of Kronstadt rose against Lenin, with the sympathy of a large part of the workers of Petrograd. The mutineers' demands were less economic than political. They accepted the revolution, but demanded an end to the Bolshevik party's dictatorship, and freedom of political choice for workers and peasants. Lenin never considered political concessions. He chose to denounce the mutiny as a plot by "White Guardists," and suppressed it bloodily. After suppressing it he introduced economic concessions, while at the same time increasing the political stranglehold of the Bolshevik party on all sectors of public life. Similarly in Berlin in 1953 the uprising was made by the workers, and its demands were political—in essence, the removal of the Ulbricht-Pieck regime. Malenkov took the same line as Lenin in 1921. He chose to attribute the movement to "fascist provocation," and suppressed it bloodily. Then he introduced economic concessions, while building up the Ulbricht regime more strongly than ever. Recently, even the economic concessions have been partly abandoned. All the evidence suggests that Moscow, far from sacrificing its puppets, intends to use them even more ruthlessly than before to oppress the people of Eastern Germany.

The other historical parallel is nearly a hundred years old. When the uncompromising autocrat, Czar Nicholas I, died in 1855, his successor, Alexander II, embarked on a series of social and administrative reforms. These met with opposition from the reactionary elements in the bureaucracy, but the Czar and the more liberal bureaucrats for a time had things their way. In 1863 the Czar's Polish subjects, to whom he had made a number of concessions, rose in armed insurrection against him, and were defeated.

The Polish revolt strengthened the influence of the reactionaries over the Czar, and discredited the liberals. Thereafter there was little more reform.*

Similarly in Berlin in 1953 the revolt followed a series of concessions. Its suppression was followed by a general stiffening of Soviet foreign policy, and by the disgrace of Beria, who seems to have stood for a more liberal policy, at least in the two very important fields of judicial reform and treatment of the non-Russian nations of the Soviet Union. The idea of taking a chance on the Germans, like the idea of taking a chance on the Poles before 1863, has been abandoned.

If Malenkov were seriously considering the formation of a united and genuinely independent Germany, he would not be bolstering up Ulbricht and Pieck. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Soviet government has decided against the gamble. If this is so, Germany will remain divided for some time yet. To Europeans this prospect is distasteful, to Germans it will seem unendurable. But they may have to endure it.

SECOND only, in German minds, to reunification of the Eastern zone with the Federal Republic is recovery of the lands lost in the East. Here a distinction may be made between the Polish and Czech territories. The land between the Oder-Neisse boundary and the 1939 frontier of Poland has been German for centuries. The Bohemian borderlands were part of Austria until 1918, and of the Czechoslovak Republic until 1938, when the Munich agreement, accepted by the four European great powers of the time, gave them to Germany. By his invasion of the purely Czech lands in 1939 Hitler himself broke the Munich agreement, and the Western Allies later stated that they considered Munich null and void. It may thus be argued that the German case for the return of the lands taken by Poland in 1945 is morally and legally stronger than the case

*Reforms for which the preparatory work had started before 1863 were completed after the Polish revolt. But no new reforms were initiated.

for German recovery of the Bohemian borderlands, though more can be said for the claim of the Bohemian Germans to return to their homelands if these remain under Czech sovereignty. In practice, however, the distinction is of doubtful value. Moral and legal arguments can be found on all three sides, and to German nationalists, whether they be of Bohemian origin or not, the Sudetenland is as much "German soil" as are the Oder-Neisse provinces.

The expulsion of millions of Germans from these lands was an act of brutality and injustice, the last in a long chain of such acts. Hitler exterminated six million Poles (half of them Jews) and planned policies which would have resulted in the Germanization or starvation of millions more. Circumstances caused him to postpone the extermination of the Czechs but official documents show that he had decided in 1940 to Germanize half of them and to destroy the other half "by all sorts of methods."*

In 1945 the Soviet army and the Polish Communist regime expelled the Germans of the annexed territories, most of them persons innocent of crimes against Poles, under conditions which led to the death of very large numbers—though only a fraction of the Poles whom Germans had killed. In Czechoslovakia the sum total of death and misery inflicted by Czechs on the expelled Germans was greater than that which Czechs had themselves suffered at German hands, though much smaller than what Hitler had had in store for them. The Czech expulsion was more horrible than the Polish for two reasons. It was conducted, not in the midst of military operations, but in conditions of comparative stability, which made it more deliberately cruel, and it was the work, not of Soviet puppets, but of a government genuinely representing a majority of the Czech people. By acquiescing in the atrocities committed against Bohemian Germans, the Czech people, it must be said, stooped to the moral level of the German people which acquiesced in Hitler's crimes.

*See *Trial of the Major German War Criminals*, Part 2, pp. 436-7.

The Western governments' acceptance of the annexations or expulsions was made subject to conditions which have not been fulfilled. They have never recognized the Oder-Neisse frontier as final. In the West the view is widespread that the settlement of 1945 will not be permanent. In principle the German expellees demand that they should return to their homes, and that the territories should be restored to Germany. They claim this as an absolute right. They talk as if no injustice had been committed by Germans against Poles and Czechs for which atonement was due. For their part the Poles and Czechs, whether Communist rulers or anti-Communist exiles, insist on the maintenance of the status quo.

AN independent Western observer, seeking an objective opinion, would probably feel that neither of these extreme points of view is tenable. He would feel that Germany owes atonement to the Polish and Czech peoples, but that it is wrong that the whole burden should be borne by those Germans—many of them innocent and honorable persons—who happened to live in the provinces in question. The dead cannot be brought back to life, and the succession of massacre and counter-massacre must cease. The problem can only be treated when the peoples of Eastern Germany, Poland, and the Czech lands have chosen freely leaders who can negotiate in their peoples' names.

If ever it is treated, it will have to be on the basis of some sort of balance. Individual Germans who have not proved themselves to be enemies of the Poles and Czechs should be allowed to return to their homes. A portion of the annexed territories might be returned to Germany, but the size and location of this territory would depend on many factors—mainly demographic and economic—which cannot be foreseen. The longer the territories remain under Polish and Czech rule, the more favorable the balance would inevitably be to the Poles and Czechs. Another approach to the problem, not necessarily incompatible with the above, is the idea of a German-Polish con-

dominium of the Oder-Neisse territories, recently suggested by Dr. Adenauer and denounced by spokesmen of the expellees. How this would work in practice it is hard to say. But that the German Chancellor can think in these terms is an encouraging sign. It is one more proof of his stature as a European statesman.

THOUGH these general observations must be made in order to set the problem in its perspective, they are at present somewhat academic. Is there in fact any prospect that the eastern frontier of Germany will be modified in the foreseeable future?

It is often suggested in the West that the Soviet Union can outbid the Western powers in the contest for German sympathies by offering to restore the eastern territories. The loss of these lands has certainly created hatred of Russia in Germany, but it has also made clear to many Germans the importance of an understanding with Russia. Prussia, it may be argued, was for generations a good friend of Russia. Many Germans hate Poles or Czechs more than they hate Bolsheviks, let alone the Russian nation. The five Partitions of Poland and the sacrifice of the Czechs to Hitler in 1939 offer precedents. And only Moscow can decide whether the eastern territories shall go back to Germany. This type of argument, very understandably from their point of view, is strongly pressed by Germans who seek to extract further favors from the United States.

To restore the lost territories to Germany would involve substantial losses to the Soviet Union. Firstly it would arouse the rage of the Polish and Czech peoples. Even under Stalinism this factor cannot be entirely ignored. Secondly, and perhaps more important, it would, by uprooting large populations, disorganize the whole industry of Poland and Czechoslovakia. The industrial output of these two most advanced of Moscow's satellites is already of substantial importance to the war economy of the Soviet Union. To make these losses worthwhile, Moscow would have to be sure of substantial gains. If she restored the territories to Ul-

bricht's puppet state, she would hardly win a single German thereby. The Ulbricht regime is so despised and detested since the revolt of June 1953 that nothing could restore its prestige in German eyes. The alternative would be to restore the territory to a united independent Germany. If such a Germany existed, the gamble might or might not be worthwhile. But it does not exist. We have given reasons above for the belief that Moscow will not, in the foreseeable future, consent to its creation.

Here again we have a deadlock. The prospects of German unity are at present small, and if Germany is neither reunited and independent, nor reunited under Ulbricht's rule, there will be no restoration of the eastern territories. At present the Soviet government cannot offer restoration, and if the Soviet government, which controls these lands, cannot restore them, there is no reason why the Western powers, which do not control them, should make empty promises to do so. Such promises would rally millions of Poles and Czechs behind Malenkov without winning for the West a single German not already on the Western side. The idea sometimes suggested in the West, that the Poles should be promised their eastern frontier of 1939 in return for restoring their western lands to Germany, is even more inept. Those Poles who wish their old eastern frontier—and there may be many of them—demand it as of right, not as compensation for loss (in the future) of the much more valuable lands in the West. But the inhabitants of the former eastern provinces of Poland are Ukrainians and White Russians, who are resolved not to be put back under Polish rule. To proclaim a policy of Yalta in reverse, as some Western writers would like, would merely increase support for Malenkov among the Russian, Ukrainian, White Russian, Polish, and Czech peoples, without winning a single new German supporter.

MEANWHILE Poland and Czechoslovakia are changing, and with them the annexed territories.

Poland and Czechoslovakia are becoming

predominantly industrial countries. For the Polish economy the annexed territories are of vital importance. The industries that flourished when these provinces were German have been largely rebuilt, and new ones have been added. In Czechoslovakia, the industries of Bohemia have been further developed, and relatively still more progress has been made in Slovakia, whose economy was very backward until the war. It is not easy to obtain a clear picture of these economic changes. Not only official propaganda by the satellite regimes, but also Polish and Czech exiled sources stress the progress made, while German sources stress the failures and incompetence. The two sets of facts are not necessarily so contradictory as they seem. Soviet industrial progress under the Five Year Plans was marked by inefficiency and wastage of human and material resources on a scale barely credible but confirmed by reliable witnesses. Yet this progress was real. At appalling cost the Soviet leaders created vast new industries, and transformed Russia into the world's second industrial power. It would be prudent to assume that something of the same sort is taking place in Poland and Czechoslovakia. The methods are wasteful and cruel, but results are being achieved.

The expulsion of the Germans left great spaces empty. These are being gradually filled. Both western Poland and the Bohemian borderlands are still underpopulated—a point which German observers understandably stress. But the high Polish birth rate is making itself felt. The natural increase of population is much higher in Poland than in Western Germany. Every year that the present frontiers remain will make the balance of population more favorable to the Poles, less favorable to the Germans. This is much less true of Czechoslovakia. This country suffers from a severe labor shortage. The loss of three million Germans, with a high proportion of skilled workers, cannot be made up for a very long time. The surplus manpower of Slovakia, hitherto backward and overpopulated, does not compensate for it. Slovak workers in

Bohemia are far fewer and far less skilled than the expelled Germans. As Slovakia itself becomes industrialized the surplus available for Bohemia will dwindle. On purely economic grounds there is a stronger case for the return of Germans to Bohemia than to western Poland.

THE new frontiers, the expulsions, and the industrialization of Poland and Czechoslovakia (including their more backward eastern provinces) are transforming not only the political but the economic geography of Europe. A Polish-Czech industrial region, with a population of nearly 40 million people, is emerging to the east of Germany. West European and American opinion is rightly impressed by the economic recovery of Western Germany. Within the western half of Europe, Germany is rapidly becoming the dominant power. German competition, within a world market reduced by the conquests of Stalinist imperialism, of course arouses anxiety in Britain and Western Europe. But within Europe as a whole, German predominance is and will be much less marked than it has been since the 1880's. This is a change which is likely to survive even the fall of Stalinism. It is one of the basic new facts about Europe of which students of international affairs must take account.

In the inter-war years Polish-Czech relations were usually bad. For this there were three main reasons. First, and probably least important, was the territorial dispute about Teschen. Second was the contrast between the devoutly Catholic Poles and the largely freethinking Czechs. Third was the mutual dislike of a Polish ruling class consisting of a bureaucracy with strong aristocratic and military traditions, and a Czech ruling class consisting of a bourgeoisie with a strongly democratic and civilian outlook. These three factors are disappearing. The territorial dispute is not important, and the increasing economic integration of Polish and Czech Silesia will remove it. In both countries the Catholic Church is stronger and more popular than ever. The fine record of Czech priests under German occupation did much

to remove the anti-Catholic prejudices of the Czech educated class which survived from Hapsburg times. The resistance of the Czech Catholic Church to the Communist regime has still further raised its standing. In Poland, the Church has always been strong. Thus today Catholicism is a factor uniting Poles and Czechs, not separating them. Thirdly, the social development of both nations is increasingly similar. This deserves more attention than it usually gets.

BOTH countries are going through an intense industrial revolution. Industrial revolutions create certain dominant social types. This is strikingly shown by the experience of the Soviet Union. From the purely social point of view, the similarities between the private bourgeoisies created by the industrial revolution in Western Europe a hundred years ago, and the state bourgeoisie created by the Soviet industrial revolution since 1929, are more impressive than the difference between private capitalism and state ownership. In Poland before 1939 the bourgeoisies, which were partly private (or capitalist) and partly state (or bureaucratic), were in any case weak. In the Czech lands the bourgeoisie, which were capitalist, were very strong. Both these groups have been destroyed by the Communist regimes. Individual members of them have found a place in the new dominant group, the state bourgeoisie, whose ranks are being filled from below, from the working class and the peasantry. Thus the social factor, like the religious, unites rather than divides Poland and Czechoslovakia.

Social development is of course powerfully affected by political conditions. As in the Soviet Union, it is distorted by the totalitarian system of Stalinism. Here there is an important difference between the Soviet Union and the two satellites to the west. In Russia the growth of democratic forces before 1917 had been weak (though less weak than is often stated in the West); these forces had been suppressed by the victorious Bolsheviks; and the Stalinist system took twenty years to grow, being complete only

at the end of the Yezhov purge of 1937-38. In Czechoslovakia democracy was extremely powerful up to 1938, and in Poland, where it was weaker, it was still a mighty force in comparison with pre-1917 Russia. In both countries, Stalinist totalitarianism was imposed ready-made. Thus today, the great majority of adult Poles and Czechs were mentally formed under a non-Communist regime. Even Communists in these countries think in different terms from their Soviet masters.

A characteristic of rising bourgeoisies is extreme nationalism. This is true of the British private bourgeoisie in the days of Kipling, of the German private bourgeoisie under William II, and of the Soviet state bourgeoisie in the age of Stalin. It can be safely assumed that it is also true of the state bourgeoisies of Poland and Czechoslovakia today. Both have cause to be proud of their industrial achievements, resentful of the constant interference of the Communist party demagogues, and still more resentful of foreign rule. Polish and Czech nationalism thus have two roots. One lies in the liberal and patriotic traditions of the past, the other in the industrial achievement of the present. The bigger and stronger the economic machines they control, the more will the Polish and Czech state bourgeoisies resent their subjection to Soviet masters. The various types of discontent—of worker against state boss, of peasant against the towns, of Catholic against religious persecution, and of ruling state bourgeois against Soviet rule—are of course separate from each other. But the causes of nationalism are powerful, they affect members of the Communist parties as well as the masses, and time will not remove them. How they will make themselves felt we cannot predict, but they will be felt.

IT HAS been suggested above that the reunification of Germany is improbable in the foreseeable future, that a change in Germany's eastern frontiers is therefore still more improbable, that industrial development in Poland and Czechoslovakia is transform-

ing the economic map of Europe, that similar social development is drawing the Polish and Czech peoples closer together, and that the emergence of new social forces is bound to create and perpetuate nationalism that is a serious danger to Soviet rule.

If these arguments are sound, there will be little obvious change in the immediate future, but there is and will be constant underlying change, which in their own vital interest the peoples and governments of the West must watch and interpret, and must be ready to exploit to their advantage whenever a real opportunity arises. Therefore the West needs not so much sudden heroism as prolonged and patient courage. The present deadlock, with its heavy financial and nervous strains, may last for many years.

This is of course a very unpopular view. From the east coast of the Atlantic it sometimes seems that American public opinion is marked by an optimism and an impatience that must make it very reluctant to accept so dull, unheroic, and irksome a prospect. With such an American attitude one can have the greatest sympathy. Yet if the facts do not fit the mood, it is not the facts but the mood that must be scrapped. To German opinion, the prospect will be still more unwelcome. Conscious of their new strength and prosperity, the Germans feel more than ever that the division of their country is intolerable. Some have visions of a German-American alliance, in which they will start as junior partner, which will bypass the decadent Westerners, the flighty French, and the tepid English. Brandishing its weapons, the Bonn-Washington axis will liberate eastern Germany. Then who knows how far the boundaries of the Reich could extend, what status the junior partner acquire? These ideas, of course, have no relevance at all to the real policy of the United States: this does not prevent them from being taken seriously by many Germans and many Frenchmen, or from being exploited by Communist propaganda.

One can feel for the democratic German, and still more for the exiles from Eastern Europe, longing to liberate their home-

lands. The frustration of exile and the peculiar capacity of East Europeans to attribute to all but themselves the most ingeniously sordid motives combine to convince them that the West Europeans are cowardly and comfort-loving traitors who have "betrayed" them to their oppressors. Yet however great one's sympathy, one is compelled to remind them that a war of liberation, whatever its result, would not only destroy materialistic Paris, decadent Rome, and ungrateful London, but would also cause the deaths of tens of millions of East Europeans, whom their Soviet masters would deport without regard for man, woman, or child. The annihilation of the Chechen people is an example to reflect on.

THE liberation of Eastern Germany and the liberation of Eastern Europe are one problem. This the peoples of the West, and above all the Germans, must understand. Germans must understand that Poles and Czechs are victims of the same Stalinist tyranny as their own kinsmen. Americans and West Europeans must pay no attention to the myths, beloved of German nationalists, that Poles and Czechs and Russians are lovers of Bolshevism, or "Asiatics." Germans may wish to make themselves sole allies of America to the exclusion of Western Europe. Americans may be impatient of French or British policy, and impressed by German recovery. French or British may exaggerate American criticisms of themselves, and fall for some of the arguments of Communist propaganda, which are often subtle and often disseminated in good faith by persons who are not Communists. Yet it remains true that America, Western Europe, and Germany stand and fall together. They must remain united, as such wise men as Dr. Adenauer recognize. They must also constantly watch their enemy and study the forces that are growing in the subject lands. They must be neither false optimists nor false pessimists. They must reject bogus short cuts but they must never abandon their long-term aim, the liberation of both Germany and Europe.